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AUTHOR Reid-Smith, Edward E.
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ABSTRACT

Reports and summaries of papers presented at the 1981 Regional Symposium on Distance Teaching in Asia are presented. The symposium, which was represented by 22 countries, was organized by the Universiti Sains (University of Science) Malaysia as part of the activities associated with the completion of 10 years of off-campus program facilities. The symposium was designed to promote information exchange among scholars involved in distance teaching, extension education, and external degree programs; to promote understanding of the problems involved in the teaching and learning process of self-learning programs; and to identify approaches to raise the effectiveness of distance teaching programs in the various countries. Reports on distance education in the following countries are presented: South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Malaysia. Selected papers on the following topics are summarized: philosophy, goals, and objectives of distance educational systems; infrastructure, staff training, and educational technology; problems in distance education; research on distance education; and attainment of regional cooperation in Asia. Information on the University of Science Malaysia and the opening and closing sessions of the symposium are included. (Author/SW)

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THE REGIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON DISTANCE TEACHING IN ASIA, PENANG, MAY 1981

A REPORT TO THE AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE BUREAU

by Edward R. Reid-Smith

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To: The International Seminars Finance Committee,
Australian Development Assistance Bureau,
Canberra City.

As a condition of sponsorship to participate in the Regional Symposium on Distance Teaching in Asia, held at the University of Science Malaysia in Penang, the I.S.F.C. requested me to prepare a Report on the Seminar.

The following Report is a summary of the proceedings of that Symposium, but in order to contain its length it does not give abstracts of all the papers and discussions. Nor does it contain suggestions or recommendations. However, these will gladly be prepared on request.

The author of this Report wishes to record his appreciation of the sponsorship which enabled him not only to present his paper as invited by the Symposium's Organising Committee, but to establish personal links with other distance educators.

1981

Edward R. Reid-Smith

Office of Research in Librarianship,
P.O. Box 744,
Wagga Wagga, N.S.W. 2650.

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THE REGIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON DISTANCE TEACHING IN ASIA, PENANG, MAY 1981

A REPORT TO THE AUSTRALIAN DEVELOPMENT ASSISTANCE BUREAU,

by Edward R. Reid-Smith

1. INTRODUCTION:

1.1 On 16 August 1980 the Vice-Chancellor of the Universiti Sains Malaysia (University of Science Malaysia) in Penang wrote to the Education Attache of the Australian High Commission in Kuala Lumpur, informing him that the University would hosting a Regional Symposium from 4 - 7 May 1981 on the theme of " The Role, Orientation and Method of Distance Teaching (Tertiary) in Asia ". The Vice-Chancellor stated that it seemed opportune for the University to commemorate the completion of ten years' teaching adult men and women through the off-campus programme in this way, not only sharing their own experiences but also learning from others in this exciting field of tertiary education.

1.2 The letter solicited the help of the Australian High Commission in publicising the Symposium in Australia, stating that the participation of educationists from this country would greatly enhance its deliberations.

1.3 The High Commission referred the Vice-Chancellor's letter to the Department of Education in Canberra on 30 September 1980, in order that institutions might consider sending delegations to the conference. The Department subsequently contacted various bodies in Australia.

2. A PERSONAL INVITATION:

2.1 On 18 November 1980 the Secretary of the Symposium (Dr. G. Dhanarajan) wrote to the present writer enclosing the first circular which identified the goals and themes of the meeting, and inviting him to present a paper on one of the six topics identified for discussion. This personal invitation is understood to have been influenced by some recent publication of the writer concerning external study in library science known to the University Librarian, as well as more general research into distance education.

2.2 The writer responded positively to this invitation, and in due course sent in an abstract of the proposed paper on " A Regional Scheme for Distance Education in Asia ", followed subsequently by the paper itself for pre-printing. The Australian Development Assistance Bureau was contacted on 9 February 1981 for aid to attend the Symposium,

and on 12th March 1981 the International Seminars Finance Committee agreed in principle to support this. The Committee expressed interest in the role of distance teaching in Asia and the relevance it could have to Australia's aid programme, and requested a detailed report on the Symposium.

3. THE UNIVERSITY OF SCIENCE MALAYSIA:

3.1 The University of Science Malaysia, situated in Penang, is now a well-established publicly-supported tertiary institution serving mainly the northern part of the country, though drawing some students from other parts. It has an extensive campus and has received considerable aid from various bodies towards providing some fine buildings with equipment. Many of the staff are well-qualified, but there appears (from brief observation) to be some need for additional staff in some areas, and for further opportunities to up-date qualifications and acquire experience from other institutions.

3.2 The Off-Campus Academic Programme of the University does seem to appear to be an area which could usefully employ further resources in the way of staff, expertise and educational technology. Nevertheless the present Programme has made considerable progress since it was established in 1971, and participants were most favourably impressed by the work being done.

3.3 The University of Science is the only institution of higher education in Malaysia conducting such a programme, and to date has provided nearly 3,000 working adults to study for tertiary qualifications whilst gainfully employed. These home-based students come from all parts of Malaysia, and represent a fraction of the potential number able to benefit from study for a degree. The degrees available to off-campus students are the B.A., B.Soc.Sc., and B.Sc. There is a current enrolment of over 800 distance education students undertaking some 150 subjects. In common with all other distance education institutions throughout the world, the attrition rate of external is higher than for internal students. However, some of these may be enabled to enter full-time study, some may move to other institutions, and others merely postpone their external studies until pressures of demands from employment and family commitments make this easier. To date nearly 600 distance education students have graduated.

4. ORGANIZATION OF THE SYMPOSIUM:

4.1 The Symposium was organized by the University of Science Malaysia and received support from the Association of Commonwealth Universities, the Commonwealth Foundation, the Inter University Council, the Lee Foundation, the Sabah Foundation, the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok, and (by experienced workshop personnel) the Open University of the U.K. The Open University also screened two of its educational films during the Symposium, and several overseas universities contributed to the display of educational materials for distance students.

4.2 Although the Symposium was organized specifically with Asian distance education in mind, input was also sought at an early date from other countries. The final result was a conference which was truly international in character and which reached a high standard of expertise and involvement in the area of distance education. Approximately 130 people participated at some time during the Symposium, but a number of these were from the University itself and did not attend all sessions. An estimate would be that there were about 90 people who formed the core of the Symposium and who participated fully. They came mainly from the ASEAN and Asian countries, but representatives of the following attended:

Australia
Bangladesh
Canada
Fiji
Hong Kong
India
Indonesia
Japan
Jordan (UNRWA/UNESCO)
Kenya
Korea
Malaysia
Pakistan
Philippines
Singapore
Sri Lanka
Thailand
U.S.A.
U.K.
UNESCO Bangkok
Nigeria
Zimbabwe (?)
Papua New Guinea.

4.3 The objectives of the Symposium were to:

(a) provide an avenue for the exchange of information among scholars involved in distance teaching, extension education and external degree programmes;

(b) enable participants to become more aware of the problems involved in the teaching-learning process of self-learning programmes;

(c) provide participants with the opportunity to consider together through workshop discussions, ways and means of raising the effectiveness of distance teaching programmes in their respective countries.

4.4 The Symposium consisted of an opening session consisting of welcoming addresses by the University and by UNESCO and followed by the keynote address; two sessions of country reports on distance education; five thematic sessions; and a plenary session. Two small-group workshops were also held. The programmes commenced at 8 a.m. daily and continued (with meal breaks) until 5 p.m. or 6 p.m. daily. Evening events were also organised. The general format was the presentation of key papers by invited speakers on homogenous topics, followed by open discussions on their themes. Non-invited papers were also available and could be included in discussions.

5. THE OPENING SESSION:

5.1 Following the opening addresses the participants were invited to see and discuss an exhibition of distance education resource materials on display in the library's very large foyer. The Chairman of the Symposium's Organising Committee (Associate Professor Ali Ahmad) paid tribute to the University and the various bodies which had contributed in an unexpectedly generous way to the Symposium, and also to the many participants whose presence had enhanced the concept of a fairly small conference into a highly important international symposium. He readily acknowledged the benefits which the University's Off-Campus Programme would gain from this personal contact with overseas educationists. The Vice-Chancellor (Tan Sri Datuk Haji Hamdan Sheikh Tahir) indicated that he looked forward to spin-off benefitting the on-campus students also, as already some of the well-produced learning materials produced by the Programme were being used by internal students. He stated that by the turn of this decade Malaysia's manpower requirements would far exceed the potential capacity of the five existing universities. This, he said, was a major factor in his decision to support the idea of the Symposium.

5.2 The Deputy Director of the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific (Mr. A. Chiba) stated that the Director-General of UNESCO based at the headquarters in Paris had enthusiastically agreed to support the initiative of a symposium, as it was in conformity with the international ministerial meetings (education and economic planning) in Colombo in 1978 and the study group on alternative use of resources in higher education in Bangkok in 1980. Distance education was there identified as one of the priority areas in higher education which could be promoted and supported by UNESCO. He saw it as a follow-up of the democratization of education in the region by universalizing primary

education, and intensifying literacy and adult mass education campaigns. He saw distance education supported by the development of technology and new media as a powerful means of democratizing education, and the seminar participants as forerunners in this process. There was also a need to train more teachers, and also to improve the quality of larger numbers of teachers in service.

5.3 The Minister of Education (Datuk Musa Hitam) of Malaysia in his opening address outlined the development of a nation-wide educational infrastructure extending from primary to tertiary level, and noted that in some rural areas this could only be done by accessing through rivers or by air. Four new universities had been established during the past ten years. Lack of resources such as space and finance, together with traditional academic structures regarding academic work, make it difficult to make tertiary education available to any but a privileged few. He saw the Off-Campus Programme as a valuable innovation which has evolved as a consequence of the fusion between modern communication technology, curriculum design, media production and education technology. Distance education could be used for pre-employment and continuing learning programmes, for adult education for life as well as for retraining needs resulting from technological advances. Malaysia's fourth Five-Year Development Plan recently approved provided a specific role to the University in its Off-Campus Programme, as a result of thorough scrutiny in 1980. The Minister gave details of educational radio and television services for primary and secondary schools, and of the supplementary multi-media kits.

5.4 The opening keynote address was given by the Pro-Chancellor, the Chief Justice of West Malaysia (Y.A.M. Raja Tan Sri Azlan Shah), who pointed out the marked inequalities of opportunity for tertiary education for working adults. This especially contrasted with the encouragement given to young people to seek admission into universities. Policies of industry, government service and the armed forces effectively barred many from the higher echelons because of lack of opportunity to qualify in traditional ways. He saw the challenge of alternative educational facilities as providing situations in which both the student and the teacher simultaneously broaden their knowledge and upgrade their skills. Efficiently implemented, distance education could maximise the utilisation of limited classroom space, residential facilities, rare specialist teachers and limited funds. It was also in consonance with the growing acceptance of the concept of life-long education which could

contribute significantly to the improvement of the quality of life of society at large. He saw universities and other institutions of higher learning as having a major role to play in coping with the problems which will be faced by a large proportion of the populace, as industry, agriculture and everyday life become rapidly and increasingly sophisticated and technologically oriented. Therewould therefore be a greater emphasis on expanding the range and type of courses offered by providing refresher courses, in-service courses, part-time study, home-based studies and similar opportunities. He saw the need for university teachers to chanel their energies into the dual functions of providing instruction for full-time degree-type courses and for part-time non-degree courses.

6. COUNTRY REPORTS ON DISTANCE EDUCATION:

6.1 Session 1 consisted of reports from South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, and Thailand, followed by questions and discussions which ran considerably beyond the time allotted. This reflected the great interest which these national reports occasioned. (The report from Burma was not presented, and the report from Thailand was presented but does not appear to have been available in a printed version.)
Session 2 consisted of reports from Bangladesh, India (presented later at the Symposium), Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Malaysia. In addition a "focus" paper was received on Thailand's Open University.

6.2 The country report from South Korea was by Dr. Woong Sun Hong of the Korean Educational Development Institute, and was entitled "Air and correspondence education in the Republic of Korea". He traced briefly the development of education in Korea, stating that although primary education was compulsory there was a large post-primary sector tapped by radio and correspondence programmes. A lack of persistence with listening to radio programmes (a survey showed only 54% as regular listeners) forced students back on local resources, and a cassette-version lending system was suggested. Teachers were unable to cater for the wide range of learning abilities, and it was noted that there was a lower rate of achievement by radio/correspondence than by regular high school students. Problems also arose from the lack of speedy feed-back from students studying by radio/correspondence, and Dr Woong called for collaboration between distance education institutions as regards educational broadcasts.

6.3 Professor Takashi Sakamoto of the Tokyo Institute of Technology presented the report on Japan. He indicated how distance educational methods (broadasting, correspondence, and telecommunication) were applied to university education, university extension and social adult education. Some 20 institutions were offering distance courses, and a number of these were undertaking pilot programmes using radio and television. The University of the Air and the National Centre for Development of Broadcast Education were co-operating in this area. About 5% of students at tertiary level were doing so by correspondence modes at private universities and junior colleges. In 1978 over 2,000 graduated at first degree level after following correspondence courses; 32.7% of these were after four years of study so apparently they were full-time students. Closed circuit television, telemail and optical fibre lecture transmitting systems have been used in some experiments in remote classroom teaching. The University of the Air is expected to increase participation by providing computerised correspondence instruction, frequent meetings at study centres, and a variety of radio and television programmes.

6.4 The report from the Philippines was given by Dr Adrea Fineza of the Ministry of Education, who is closely concerned with the development of the new Asian University for Independent Studies in Manila. She noted that the country's Distance Study System (DSS) was established in 1976 to help serve a population of 49 million people scattered throughout its 7,100 islands. It uses the existing Ministry of Education's machinery in the regions and provinces to reach rural students through self-learning modules. Some 297 centres have been established in 11 regions, and 56 local radio stations broadcast to the 28,643 students enrolled with the DSS. Courses include nutrition education, cottage industry, and curriculum development for teachers, in addition to the more usual topics. Theory is integrated with practice, and the models are self-pacing. The Asian University for Independent Studies is in its first year, and will expand its media to include taped lessons, simulation games and software for electronic media. It aims to assist the existing educational system to meet national needs such as those in the areas of literacy, manpower and skills development, and cultural development.

6.5 Dr. Ponlasit Noochoochal outlined the development of Ramkhamhaeng University since its establishment in 1971 to take over the distance education role of the Thammasat University (which had had an open policy

since 1933. A further institution, Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University, was established in 1978. Ramkhamhaeng University was basically a conventional institution until 1976, when it switched to distance teaching to facilitate the planned eventual enrolment of some 70,000 students. It uses 43 radio stations throughout Thailand to broadcast its distance education programmes, but so far only one TV station has been available. The recent setting up of a TV network by using satellite facilities will expand this mode. There are 12 study centres at which classes are held for students during weekends. One major problem is the lack of teachers trained in distance methods, and insufficient preparation time for producing radio and TV lessons. A further problem is that air-time is cheapest when people are working.

6.6 Dr Khan Md. Sirajul Islam (Director of the School Broadcasting Programme of the Ministry of Education in Dacca, Bangladesh) prepared a paper which began by giving some background statistics: a population of 90 million in some 55,000 square miles of whom 20% are literate. Bengali is the common language of instruction, with English as the second language. 85% of the population live in villages. The second Five-Year Plan emphasises various mass media to overcome shortages of teachers, books and educational equipment. The implementation of a Distance Education Programme (DEP) was proposed in 1980, and a National Task Force is to prepare the Master Plan by July 1981. A United Nations expert and five British specialists have joined the Force, and it is proposed to establish a National Institute of Distance Education using similar educational techniques to those of the U.K. Open University. The basic function will be to offer non-degree training courses for teachers, with an emphasis on rural development.

6.7 Professor Bakhshish Singh of Punjabi University presented the report on distance education in India, stating that the adoption of this mode in third world countries has been met in some cases by resistance from traditionalists who lack awareness of the innovative systems being devised. In India there has been a great increase in demand for higher education, which the many new universities and colleges have been unable to satisfy. The Planning Commission proposed the establishment of evening colleges and correspondence courses in order to widen access more democratically, and delegations studies the systems in operation in both western Europe and the USSR. There are now 25 universities offering tertiary-level correspondence courses, and six institutions offer correspondence tuition for the B.Ed. degree. Two institutions have

offered special correspondence courses for farmers, and others have devised vocational and job-oriented postgraduate courses also. In order to ensure parity of acceptance the correspondence versions of undergraduate and graduate courses are the same as for internal students as regards syllabi and examination papers, though naturally these vary between institutions. English and Hindi are the normal languages but some universities may use local languages for instruction. The University Grant Commission has constituted a Standing Committee for Part-time and Own-time Education, which has issued guidelines on the methodology and use of resources in correspondence teaching. Copyright of lessons is vested in the universities. No university has as yet imposed the UGC recommendation that students must obtain satisfactory grades in the responses to questions in each lesson, and there is a low return rate for these response sheets. There is also low attendance at the Personal Contact Programmes, though attendance is compulsory at postgraduate level. The University Institutes (Directorates) of Correspondence Courses may be regarded as inferior by the regular Teaching Departments, which may block innovations.

6.8 The report on Sri Lanka was prepared by Mr. K.M.D. Perera of the Institute of Distance Education (the Open University of Sri Lanka as it is known). He stated that only a fraction of the people with the minimum entry qualifications gained admission to tertiary education, and that this created a large segment of society commonly termed "University Shut-Outs" or "University rejects". The government had found it financially extremely difficult to provide traditional type of higher education for the very large numbers involved, and so distance education was seen as a solution as it was seen that the cost in developed countries for this mode was less than for internal study. In 1976 it established the Technical Education Extension Service Unit as a pilot project, and in the same year it was reorganised as the Sri Lanka Institute of Distance Education. Operating with assistance from UNESCO, Britain and Sweden, the Institute had nearly 5,000 students by 1980. There is regular face-to-face tuition once or twice a month, using the existing technical college network. In 1972 the University of Sri Lanka set up an external examinations system, and later added extension services; some 30,000 students were registered for external degrees. The Open University of Sri Lanka was founded in 1980 by the Ministry of Higher Education and incorporated the Institute as well as the external services agency of the University of Sri Lanka.

6.9 Dr. Ahmed Mohiuddin, Vice-Chancellor of the Allama Iqbal Open University in Islamabad, prepared the report on Pakistan. He pointed out that 70% of its population earn its livlihood from farming, consists of about 80 million people, and has a "low" illiteracy rate of 23.7%. The Open University was established in 1974 as a cost-effective way of easing the pressure on the formal stream of higher education, and to present alternative facilities for learning and training. By 1980 some 100,000 student course registrations had been recorded. In addition to other media, the textual materials are issued in the form of units. Normally a semester course requires 15 - 20 hours of study per unit per week. Radio and TV is also used, time being purchased at concessional rates. There are currently ten Regional Offices which provide information and advice to the students, and are a means of feed-back to the University. Each student is allocated to a specially engaged tutor at a convenient study centre, and there are about 1,000 appointed part-time from teachers in local universities, colleges and schools. There are 41 Ordinary and 62 Technical Study Centres. The largest number of students 1975-80 were in the field of teacher education, and men are very much in the majority. Interim studies indicate that costs to the University are about the same as for a traditional institution at intermediate level, but considerably lower at degree level. It currently offers 41 courses to about 44,000 students

6.10 The final country report was given by Dr. Ali Ahmad of the University of Science Malaysia, Co-ordinator of the Off-Campus Programme there. The University's programme represents the core of the country's efforts at distance education, and prior to its foundation in 1971 there were only commercial agencies which helped students study for external awards of overseas universities. The power to award external degrees was given to the university in Penang when it was established in 1969, and this autgority was invoked two years later. Parity with internal courses is maintained though the methods of teaching differ. There is considerable personal contact between students and staff in the form of staff visits to regional centres, the annual 3-week Intensive Course, and the one year full-time component of the courses. Degrees are awarded after successful completion of a four-year unitised system of study, but must be completed within eight years of starting. The final year is completed by full-time on-campus study. It is estimated that the cost of teaching an off-campus student is approximately 20% of the cost of teaching an on-campus student.

7. PHILOSOPHY, GOALS AND OBJECTIVES OF DISTANCE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS:

7.1 The third session of the Symposium was devoted to papers on the organizational framework of distance education institution or unit, and how its affects the curriculum and methods of teaching and learning. The keypaper was presented by Mr. Eric Gough of Deakin University, on the topic of "Evaluating Distance Education". He gave a definition as follows: "Distance education is a means of providing learning experience for students through the use of self-instructional materials and access to educational resources, the use of which is largely determined by the student and which allow the student, for the most part, to choose the time, place and circumstance of learning". Although there is no consensus on what is meant byquality in distance education, without satisfactory quality the apparent extension of opportunity will be illusory. In Australia off-campus courses cater primarily for urban rather than isolated students. An important motive for evaluation is to improve the quality of learning experiences, but there are also economic and political aspects. There must be sufficient students to ensure viability, and monitoring should ensure provision of high quality educational experience. Several models were mentioned but Mr Gough emphasised that the important point was that evaluation in some form is essential.

7.2 Several "focus" papers were presented by their authors. These were: (a) "Philosophy, goals and objectives of broadcast education" by Professor Kenji Fujita, of the National Centre for Development of Broadcast Education, Japan;

(b) "Satellite-based distance education: problems and solutions" by Dr. G.D. Potter, of the University of Victoria, Canada;

(c) "The organisation of distance learning and how it affects the contents of teacher education in Nigeria", by Hafiz S. Wali, Director of the National Teachers Institute in Kaduna;

(d) "Providing learning contexts for isolated university students: an organizational structure appropriate for Western Australia", by Mr. Patrick Guiton of Murdoch University;

(e) "The philosophy, goals and objectives of distance education", by Professor Bakhshish Singh of India.

A number of "support papers" were tabled by their authors, and were available in printed versions for Symposium participants.

8. INFRASTRUCTURE, STAFF TRAINING AND EDUCATIONAL TECHNOLOGY:

8.1 The fourth session of the Symposium was devoted to the themes of the infrastructure, academic staff training, and the use of educational technology to develop effective teaching and learning in distance education. The keypaper was presented by Dr. K.T. Livingston of the University of the South Pacific, in Suva, Fiji. His paper was titled: "Implications for overcoming problems in distance education", and he pointed out that tertiary educational institutions in Australasia and the south Pacific area have adopted the integrated model, whereby the same institution offers both on-campus and off-campus facilities to students. This contrasts with the open university type (which will offer only external courses) found in other institutions. There is a continuum internationally, ranging from "pure" institutions in which there is no reliance on face-toface or electronic media contact, to those where compulsory weekly sessions (or residential schools) are built into the programmes. Based on the institution's philosophy, he saw two major phases in the distance education process: (a) course development and preparation, and (b) teaching or administering the course. (Two other areas of concern, acknowledged but not dealt with in detail, were pre-course counselling, and post-course evaluation.)

8.2 Dr. Livingston noted that at first sight the teaching/administering function seemed to have more in common with on-campus work, especially as staff are likely to be involved in courses already prepared. One important difference however is that the on-campus teacher is more in control of all phases of the teaching process, and does not have to rely on intermediaries. Related to this is the need for planning and scheduling well ahead of time, lessening the possibility of flexibility. Furthermore, the tone and content of comments to students is a crucial aspect of distance education. He cited Professor Borje Holmberg who had pointed out staff difficulties in recognising the essential differences of distance teaching; many traditional teachers when confronted by what they see as deficiencies in distance programmes react by trying to use more traditional or face-to-face teaching, instead of improving the actual distance aspects of the programme. Dr Livingston pointed out that distance education is a group enterprise, and is more a matter of attitudes. The integrated model calls for clear objectives, demarcation of areas of responsibility, and control of staff workloads in each mode of teaching. Respect for the professionalism of other members of the teams is essential.

8.3 Five "focus" papers were prepared and discussed as follows:

(a) "The development and organization of regional study centres for off-campus programmes" by Dr G. Dhanarajan, of U.S.Malaysia;

(b) "The University of the South Pacific's experience in the use of media for distance education" by Dr. C. Zuber of Fiji;

(c) "The use of media for distance teaching at Thailand's Sukhothai Thammathirat Open University" by Dr Chaiyong Brahmawong;

(d) "Problems and prosepects on distance education in Chulalongkorn University" by Dr Muangtong Khemmani of Thailand;

(e) "Active use of broadcasting for distance education" by Ms. Miiko Kodama of Tokyo, Japan.

Six support papers were tabled by their authors, some of them dealing specifically with staff training in distance education. They were not the subject of talks but were included for discussion subsequently.

9. PROBLEMS IN DISTANCE EDUCATION:

9.1 Session five was held around the these of problems in distance education and the strategies in overcoming them. The keypaper was given by Professor Mike Pentz, Dean of the Faculty of Science of the Open University of the United Kingdom, and was entitled: "Experiences in ten years of science teaching at a distance". He outlined the basis of team prepartion of courses from the outset of the establishment of the Open University in 1969, and some difficulties in designing courses which would both be accessible to the unqualified entrants for whom the programme of openness was intended and to the large numbers of school teachers whom surveys had indicated would be likely to enrol. The ordinary B.A. would entail six credits and the B.A. (Hons.) eight; the standard of the latter would equate with the general honours of on-campus British universities but not of the special honours offered in the U.K. This policy determined the student workload of off-campus students based on the total workload of full-time on-campus students for British general honours degrees. Teaching began in 1971 with 5,000 students, most of whom were taking a small number of science subjects for the B.A. ordinary degree; in 8 years only 150 students had passed science honours degrees (defined as two or more science subjects at third-year level) but 2,100 had obtained ordinary degrees which included some science subjects. The proport ion of women registered for science subjects has risen from 20% to 30%, and they have a slightly higher success rate than men.

9.2 The Open University uses correspondence text materials and tuition, television and radio broadcasts, audio-cassettes, home experiments, weekend/day schools, summer schools, and computer aided learning. It is limited finacially to some 20,000 new students each

year, which is half the number of applicants. This implies an undergraduate student population of about 70,000. Student record files are computerised, and performance data can be accessed and used as a factor in analyses to indicate trends within subjects and to identify problem subjects in any year. The greater manpower needed to produce subjects in science and technology, recognised late by the university, has resulted in staffing levels which are inadequate to produce a good selection of such subjects at third and fourth levels. This means less opportunity for science honours graduates. Production of distance-learning materials is costly especially in academic manpower, and Professor Pentz estimated that at least 16 man-years of academic effort is needed to produce a full-credit science subject (this excludes non-academic man-years). The consequent production of a low-resource subject led to significantly lower student-achievement. Because of the open admissions policy combined with a high final-year standard, it is suggested that the second- level is too advanced for many unqualified students; the solution may be to require two intermediate levels and to increase the number of credits so required to complete a degree in science. Professional association recognition has been achieved in some areas.

9.3 Six focus papers were spoken to by their authors and formed the major topic of subsequent discussion sessions:-

(a) "The correspondence student: some critical issues" by Dr Ramayan Prasad of Bhopal University, India;

(b) "An informative essay on training adult education teachers for the Kenyan Literacy Campaign through distance education" by Mr B.K. Gitau of the University of Nairobi, Kenya;

(c) "Language teaching and distance education: can reasonable communicative competence be acquired in a self-learning programme?" by Dr. A. Chamberlain of the SEAMEO Regional Language Centre, Singapore;

(d) "The management of resources to forwardplan in the design, development, production and evaluation of distance education teaching materials". by Dr Michael Parer of Deakin University;

(e) "Becoming an external adult learner" by Mr George A. Idle, of Western Australian Institute of Technology;

(f) "Characteristics of part-time students and their learning problems" by Mr M.O. Chukwu, National Teachers' Institution, Nigeria.

Four support papers were tabled by their authors but not presented in talks; their subject matter however was included in discussions.

10. RESEARCH ON DISTANCE EDUCATION:

10.1 Professor Dennis D. Gooler of the Division of Educational Development and Administrative Studies in the School of Education, Syracuse University, New York, gave the keypaper in the sixth session. His paper was entitled: "Critical issues in evaluating distance teaching programmes". He stated that evaluation is an effort to understand better both the promises and the reality of distance education programmes, and is a process designed to collect information which will help answer certain management questions. Professor Gooler's address dealt with three major areas: (a) the rationale given for distance education programmes; (b) the three elements which are critical in defining a conceptual framework for evaluating such programmes; and (c) a process or structure which may be useful in planning a specific evaluation programme. The process of evaluation was considered to consist of (i) clarifying the questions to be addressed; (ii) the technicalities of data gathering and analysis; and (iii) reporting the data in the form required by potential users.

10.2 He spent some time in enumerating the various rationales often put forward in support of distance education programmes, such as numbers and need, egalitarianism, economic factors, quality of education, and the production of spin-offs. Evaluation should set out to prove or disprove these assertions in practice. The conceptual framework for the evaluation could be built around the keywords "criteria" (the variables which may be used in assessment), "standards" (an authoritative principle implying a pattern for guidance, for purposes of comparison), and "indicators" (statistics or other instruments of quality used to describe a programme at a given time). It is necessary to plan evaluation, to manifest our conceptions of the purposes of the evaluations, but they should be guidelines rather than prescriptions. From the literature Professor Gooler listed eight elements of an evaluation plan: purposes, audiences, issues, resources, evidence, data-gathering, analysis, and reporting. Evaluation of distance education may have different purposes at various times. However, evaluation is an investment.

10.3 Three focus papers were poken to in this session:

(a) "Some aspects of the off-campus academic programme at Universiti Sains Malaysia" by Ms. Josephine Choo;

(b) "Students' use of audio cassettes as an educational medium in distance education" by Mr. J.E. Gough (Deakin University) and R.J. McDonald (Murdoch University);

(c) "Academic information needs of distance educators" by Professor D.F. Swift of the Open University of the U.K.

There were no support papers tabled for this session, and the discussion therefore centred on the above four papers alone. The session was also followed by small group workshops on the theme of student problems and research.

11. TOWARDS REGIONAL COOPERATION IN ASIA:

11.1 The seventh session was specifically concerned with possibilities and problems involved in co-operation within the Asian region as far as distance education may be planned. This session was chaired by Mr. A. Chiba of the UNESCO Regional Office for Education in Asia and the Pacific, Bangkok, Thailand. It may be seen as being the climax of the several sessions in which papers were presented and discussed, as evidenced by the choice of chairman and the selectiveness of the papers. The chairman, Mr. Chiba, took the opportunity to present an unscheduled paper of his own on the topic of "Regional Co-operation in Distance Education", as a result of attending the previous sessions and reading the pre-prints of this session. He outlined the background of UNESCO's involvement in higher education in Asia since the Karachi Plan conference of 1959/1960, and the functions of the UNESCO Regional Office in Bangkok. After setting up three other regional centres, UNESCO decided on a new policy by asking the National Institute of Educational Research in Tokyo to act as a focal point, and in 1971 the Asian Ministers decided to transfer the regional institutes to the national authorities. Some of their functions have been transferred to the office in Bangkok which remains a UNESCO undertaking. A network of national information and development led in 1973 to the establishment of the Asian Programme of Educational Innovation for Development, later adopted by the U.N. Development Programme as its model for Technical Co-operation among Developing Countries. UNESCO has not only encouraged developments in distance education, but the regional office's group training course has been used by several national bodies in Asia.

11.2 Dr Abdul Rahim Said of the University of Science Malaysia presented a paper in this session, entitled "Some thoughts on regional co-operation", in which he gives a scenario for 1991 which indicates some of the progress in distance education during the decade. He then outlined some of the framework which would have to be

established in order to make the scenario come true. Activities were categorised as resources, staffing and students. Exchange of resources might involve exchange of materials, a regional resource centre, a translation bureau, a fund, and satellite link-up. An exchange of academic staff, provision for staff development, and a regular forum for academic advancement were all seen as important. Transfer of credits and student exchange would help to increase the intra-region mobility and lessen the outflow from the region. It would be necessary to establish a distance education council for Asia.

11.3 The present writer, Mr Edward R. Reid-Smith of Wagga Wagga, Australia, then addressed the Symposium on the subject of his paper which was entitled "A Regional Scheme for Distance Education in Asia". He briefly surveyed some of the differences and the common factors of Asian countries, in order to suggest ways in which both could be used to advantage in distance education for the region. Differences in educational systems were noted, as also in many cases their original importation from other cultures. The British and the American models were particularly widespread in Asia, and some incompatibilities made international co-operation somewhat difficult. Languages were seen as being a problem in some cases: it can be both a barrier to education and a means of accessing the world's information. Some countries such as India and PapuaNew Guinea had many languages each; in other cases several countries may use an international language such as Chinese (due to migrating populations) and English (part of the colonial inheritance). Unilateral and bilateral economic aid may create a linguistically-privileged group, acting as a hindrance to the remainder of the national population.

11.4 Higher or tertiary education was seen as falling within the three fields of: (a) general education;
(b) vocational education;
(c) continuing or adult education.

Some barriers to access were common to each field, but others were unique. Distance education could help to overcome many of these barriers; courses or subjects from another institution or country may fill a gap in local provision. He suggested that a Working Group be set up from the delegates to the Symposium, charged with the task of drawing up a plan for a Regional Scheme for Distance Education in Asia. It would need to consider at least the following points:

(a) production of packaged learning resources;
(b) copyright and translation of packages;

(c) feedback between tutor and student;

(d) accreditation and validation;

(e) transfer of credits;

(f) joint awards.

It was recognised that some staff had considerable expertise in distance teaching methods, whereas many others were untrained and had distance students imposed on their normal work-loads without adequate back-up facilities. Duplication of subject-offerings within the region does exist, and some institutions were better able than others to produce good-quality learning materials. Small production teams were envisaged to prepare materials which could be translated for use elsewhere in the region, and it was suggested that copyright be vested in the financing organisation.

11.5 Mr Reid-Smith pointed out that use of regional packages still allowed local input by tutors, and that dialogue between student and tutor is an essential part of any educational process. Validation of learning resources, subjects and courses of study is essential for international acceptability, and this would be assisted by having an international body of repute to organise the scheme. Transfer of credited subjects between institutions would be an integral part of the scheme, and this leads logically to two or more institutions jointly offering courses of study to an agreed curriculum with each institution offering a segment by the distance mode. Objections to features in such a scheme would be administrative rather than educational ones, but administrators are experts in facilitating projects and in overcoming problems once the political decision has been made. He stated that the organising body must have recognised educational and international authority acceptable to Asian nations, and that the two major alternatives were (i) to use an existing body or (ii) set up a new one. Mr Reid-Smith's own inclinations were to request UNESCO to undertake the programme, either through its regional office in Bangkok or through the proposed UNESCO Asian University in Japan. The Working Group should prepare guidelines for UNESCO, which would undertake detailed planning and operate the scheme on behalf of Asian governments.

11.6 The final paper of the Symposium was presented by Mr. A.E. Grimwade of R.M.I.T., and was entitled "Regional and international organizations for distance education". Basically the speaker gave useful data on regional characteristics, and outlined the differences

which these implied when comparing needs for distance education within Asia and Australia. The speaker summarised the distance education systems in Australia in general and Victoria in particular, with some mention of New Zealand. He followed with an account of the work of the Australia and South Pacific External Studies Association (ASPESA), which is a professional body directed primarily towards development of its personal members. Mention was also made of other international bodies such as the International Council for Correspondence Education (ICCE), the British Open University Centre for International Co-operation and Services (OUCICS), the Open University's International Institute for Distance Learning, and the International Extension College which is also based in Britain.

12. PLENARY SESSION AND CLOSING CEREMONY:

12.1 The final session of the Symposium considered a draft resolution made the previous evening at an ad hoc meeting of some Asian participants, based on informal talks amongst several Indian delegates the day before. The resolution was not adopted in its proposed form as it was too wide-ranging, and it became evident that the calls for financial support from the University of Science Malaysia and from UNESCO would not be forthcoming from either body. It was pointed out that the ICCE (of which Professor Bakhshish Singh was President) also suffered from lack of finance, and that a non-official body such as the proposed Distance Educational Council for Asia (DECASIA) would not have the structure or recognised authority to attract sufficient resources to undertake the many tasks. Eventually two participants were chosen to investigate the matter further. (Private conversations subsequently confirmed the present writer's opinion that official support would not be likely for the kind of body proposed, and UNESCO itself would not finance such an organisation until it had proved itself.)

12.2 Regarding the author's proposal for a regional scheme based on UNESCO, it was a project which would have to be considered by UNESCO planning in Paris. With the new policy of supporting regional institutions rather than developing its own regional centres, the second alternative noted by Mr Reid-Smith (that of a UNESCO-sponsored Asian university undertaking distance education) would be more in line with current directions. A Working Group was not set up at the Symposium, but informal discussions are taking place.

12.3 Closing speeches were made by the Vice-Chancellor and by the Chairman of the University Council of the University of Science

Malaysia, and by members of the Organizing Committee of the Symposium. Thanks were made to the University and to members of its staff who had made the Symposium possible, and a very memorable and worthwhile experience.

13. CONCLUSION:

13.1 This Symposium was undoubtedly an important landmark in distance education and in international pooling of expertise. What had been envisaged as a fairly small gathering eventuated in a large gathering of experts from all parts of the world. The papers were comprehensive and wide-ranging, and the discussions informed and informative. The sessions were intensive and the contacts made or re-established will be a long-lasting by-product of personal attendance rather than merely reading the papers. The large and international attendance indicates the importance which distance education has for the immediate future of many nations.

13.2 The present writer wishes to acknowledge deep appreciation to the Australian Development Assistance Bureau in facilitating his active participation in the Symposium. Interest in Australian affairs and in present and potential contributions to Asian education was most apparent, and south-east Asian participants in particular are aware of the increasing importance of this country in the general life of the region (a view not shared to the same extent by participants from the Indian sub-continent). The writer feels that he has made a significant contribution to the Symposium by his interaction with other members, and has returned to Australia with considerable information on the philosophies and methods of distance education in various countries. Distance education will be a major growth industry not only in Australia but also in the ASEAN countries in the next few years.

13.3 The writer is in communication with several other participants, and has been able to prepare examples of learning resources for part-time distance students for an Asian university which does not currently employ this mode for teaching library and information science.

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P.O. Box 744,
Wagga Wagga, N.S.W. 2650

Edward R. Reid-Smith
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